

## ECOSYSTEM STATUS INDICATORS

### *Seabirds*

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### Distribution

#### Pelagic

The pelagic distribution of seabirds in Alaskan waters has not been examined comprehensively in recent years. Comparisons to historical information, especially that of the OCSEAP surveys completed in the 1970's, and to current fishing effort cannot be made given current data gaps. Recent efforts to address this information gap have included the implementation of stationary seabird surveys on longline and trawl fisheries research vessels. This program was initiated in 2002 by the Washington Sea Grant Program in collaboration with the International Pacific Halibut Commission, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and NMFS to complete "bird-feeder" type surveys on charter vessels conducting halibut and sablefish surveys. Counts of seabird abundance were performed after each set was brought aboard and within a standardized area astern. Data collected in 2002 were reported (Melvin et al. 2004), as will the 2003 information. In 2004 the program was expanded from longline charter vessels to groundfish charters operated by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. The opportunity to develop a line-transect seabird survey program on platforms of opportunity is currently being explored.

#### Colonies

(Not updated). The sizes of seabird colonies and their species composition differ among geographic regions of Alaska (Figure 94), due to differences in marine habitats and shoreline features (Stephensen and Irons 2003). In the southeastern GOA, there are about 135 colonies, and they tend to be small (<60,000 birds, and often <5,000). Exceptions are two colonies with 250,000-500,000 birds at Forrester and St. Lazaria Islands. Along the coast of north-central Gulf of Alaska (GOA), colonies are generally small but number over 850 locations, with larger colonies at the Barren and Semidi Island groups.

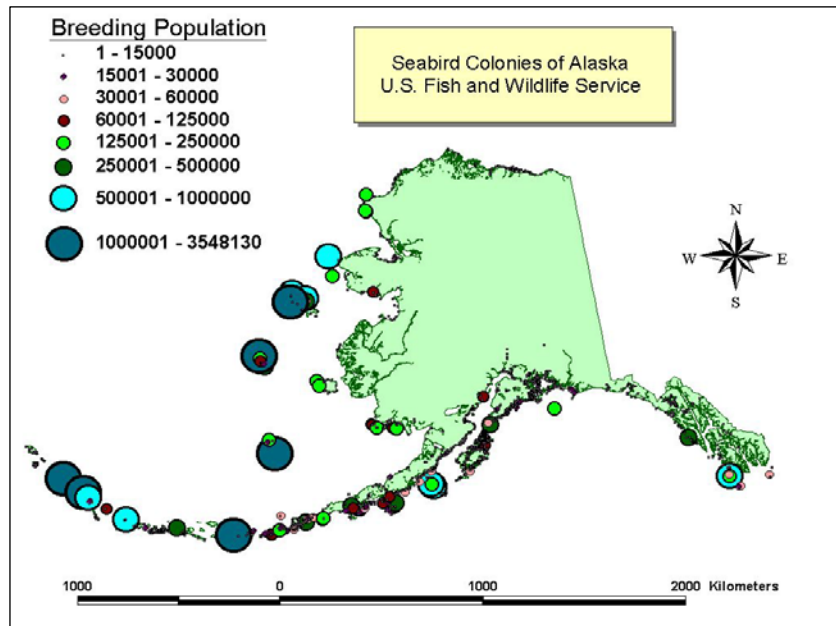


Figure 94. Seabird Colonies of Alaska. Beringian Seabird Colony Catalog (USFWS 2003).

Moving west along the Alaska Peninsula (with 261 colonies) and throughout the Aleutians (144 colonies), colonies increase in size, and include several with over 1 million birds and two with over 3 million birds. Large colonies of over 3 million birds are also found on the large islands of the Bering Sea (BS). Relatively few colonies are located along the mainland of the BS coast, and colonies along the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas are small and dispersed.